

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY AND PROCEDURES		
Reference: 01-06	Effective Date: October 1, 1997 Revision Date: June 10, 2010	Page 1 of 4
SUBJECT: PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY		
RATIONALE: The purpose of this policy is to guide Division/Institution/Office practices when releasing information publicly. The intent of this policy is to insure authorized Department employees respond to media requests by providing accurate information in a timely manner, while adhering to Utah law regarding information classification and statutory restrictions.		

POLICY:

All information and records created by the Department and its Divisions/Institutions/Offices (D/I/O's) are available to the public and news media representatives provided the release is not restricted by Government Records Access Management Act (GRAMA) or other statute.

- Authorized Media Contacts

D/I/O Directors may represent their respective agencies. Each D/I/O, in conjunction with the Department Public Information Officer, is responsible for designating which of its employees is authorized to represent the D/I/O with the media. Before any employee represents his/her D/I/O, he/she must:

A) Receive designation as an "Authorized Media Contact" from his/her D/I/O director and complete the Department Public Information Training Session. Authorized Media Contacts may represent the D/I/O before the media at any time.

or

B) Receive specific permission from an Authorized Media Contact to speak to the media on a case-by-case basis.

Department media designation and training are not required when employees speak at public events. D/I/O directors and other managers are encouraged to be aware of topics their employees will speak about when representing them at public events.

- Media Contact Protocol

The Department of Human Services and its D/I/O's shall expedite contacts from members of the news media and provide a consistent on-message response. No initial call from a journalist should wait longer than 30 minutes without a callback to report the status of the journalist's request.

D/I/O offices that are prone to receive contacts from the media should designate a Public Information Contact (PIC). The PIC must complete the Basic Public Information Training. The PIC may or may not be authorized to represent the D/I/O in the media, but is trained in proper handling of news media requests.

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All contacts from members of the news media should be reported to the Department Public Information Officer of any media contacts as soon as possible and no later than the close of business each day. The person handling the journalist's request should report the substance of the call plus any areas of concern immediately. Contacts regarding controversial or highly sensitive issues should be referred to the Public Information Officer by telephone. Routine contacts may be reported via e-mail.

D/I/O's shall report the names of their respective Authorized Media Contacts and Public Information Contacts to the Department Public Information Officer.

- Procedures for Handling Media Calls

1) Note the time of the call. Find out all the information the journalist needs. Explain that you may not have the answers, but you can find someone to answer the questions.

2) Ask if the journalist has a deadline.

3) Refer the request to an Authorized Media Contact or Public Information Contact who could best handle the journalist's needs and make a return call within 30 minutes or contact the Department Public Information Officer at 801-520-2777 (24-hour media line).

Special Cases

When a journalist requests a contact (i.e., interview, photograph, etc.) with a person in the custody of any DHS D/I/O, and that person is either a minor or incompetent to represent him/herself, the request must be referred to the office of the D/I/O director and processed per D/I/O policy, or referred to the Department Public Information Officer.

- Initiating Media Releases and Events

D/I/O's should issue media releases, advisories, interviews, and other news media contacts within their stewardship of geography, authority, and responsibility. The Department Public Information Officer must approve all initiated news media contacts, specifically releases and advisories, prior to public dissemination.

Practice

Agency offices located in St. George, for example, should only solicit news coverage in their area. Likewise, the Department or other state offices should usually avoid faxing press releases to all media statewide when the issue is one primarily concerning the Wasatch Front.

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- Involving the Governor in Media Events

All requests for the Governor's time or involvement in media events, releases, advisories or proclamations shall be coordinated through the Department Public Information Officer. All requests within the Department of Human Services and its D/I/O's for the Governor's involvement in media events shall be referred to a D/I/O Director who will coordinate the request with the Department Public Information Officer.

- When and How to Use GRAMA

When information requests are received, the Department, its agencies and employees shall review information for possible statutory restrictions or classifications under the Utah Government Records Access and Management Act (GRAMA) before such information is released publicly. Information, which is not restricted by statute or GRAMA classification, may be released to any public or news media requestor without further review or official GRAMA request. The Department Public Information Officer must be notified about media GRAMA requests.

Requests for information subject to restriction by statute or GRAMA classification shall be referred to a designated GRAMA Officer of the D/I/O or Department. The GRAMA Officer shall process such requests in accordance with Utah Code Annotated Chapter 63G Title 2 or other state or federal law.

- Free Speech Policy

Employees may speak freely within or outside their occupations. No Department of Human Services' policy or practice shall be construed as to limit the personal free expression of any employee. Employees are not restricted from speaking to the media on their own time, however do not represent the department or can they discuss matters that are private, protected or controlled pursuant to Utah law. When employees speak to members of the news media or to a public body in any context where the employee will be perceived to represent his/her D/I/O or the State of Utah, the employee must conform to Department Public Information Policies and provide consistent, on-message responses.

Regardless as to whether the employee is on or off duty, he/she should not comment on any private, protected or controlled information (doing so, they could be subject to criminal prosecution under GRAMA) and cannot provide any protected health information about any patient (HIPAA).

When an employee is off duty and outside Department property, he/she may speak on any matter; so far as his/her expressions do not divulge information restricted by GRAMA classification or other state or federal law. If an employee chooses to express opinions to the news media or in any public manner, but the employee is not authorized to represent the Department or any of its D/I/O's, the employee is free to do so on his/her own time and outside Department property. If the employee's expressions are likely to be construed by others to represent the position of his/her D/I/O, the

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Department, or the State (when the employee is unauthorized to do so), the employee must clearly disavow his/her opinions from the D/I/O while speaking in that context.

- Internet Publishing

The Internet should be regarded as any other public medium. Agencies are encouraged to place all public information or services on their respective Internet sites, as feasible. Information should always be checked for accuracy and any restrictions (as dictated by statute or GRAMA classification) before it is published on the Internet.

The Department's Web Development Group and the Electronic Product Manager, in conjunction with the Public Information Officer (PIO), provides the Department's Internet publishing oversight. Any substantial changes to content or form of Department and Agency web pages must be reviewed and approved by the Web Development Group and/or the Electronic Product Manager with input from the PIO prior to publishing the change

Each D/I/O shall designate a Content Specialist authorized to request revisions to D/I/O information published on the Internet. The Web Development Group may accept additions and changes to Department and D/I/O pages only from the Content Specialists. The Content Specialist will work with the web developer from the Web Development Group assigned to their D/I/O. Refer to the Department's Policy Manual: *Web Standards and Procedures Policy (06-08)* for additional information. <http://www.hspolicy.utah.gov/>

A private corporation, business, provider or other commercial entity, whether or not operating for profit, may not have its information published on an Internet site within the domains of the Department or its agencies. The Department or its agencies may post "links" to other Internet sites belonging to commercial and non-commercial entities. Such links must have a useful public purpose, which supports the mission of the Department or its agencies. If a D/I/O posts a link to any such entity, it must allow the posting of all other links to entities, which meet the same criteria.



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